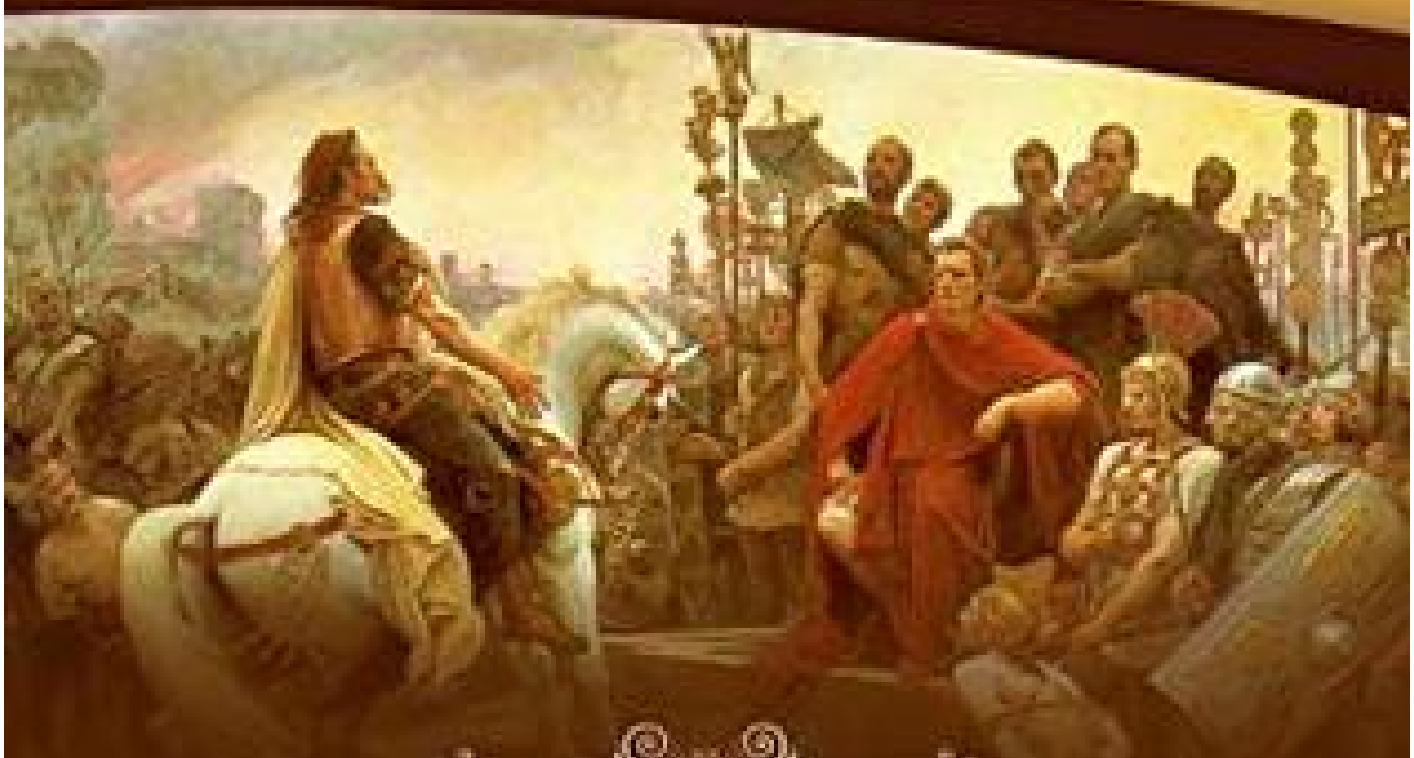
THE GALLIC WARS

A CAPTIVATING GUIDE TO THE MILITARY CAMPAIGNS THAT EXPANDED THE ROMAN REPUBLIC AND HELPED JULIUS CAESAR TRANSFORM ROME INTO THE GREATEST EMPIRE OF THE ANCIENT WORLD



CAPTIVATING HISTORY

The Gallic Wars

A Captivating Guide to the Military Campaigns that Expanded the Roman Republic and Helped Julius Caesar Transform Rome into the Greatest Empire of the Ancient World

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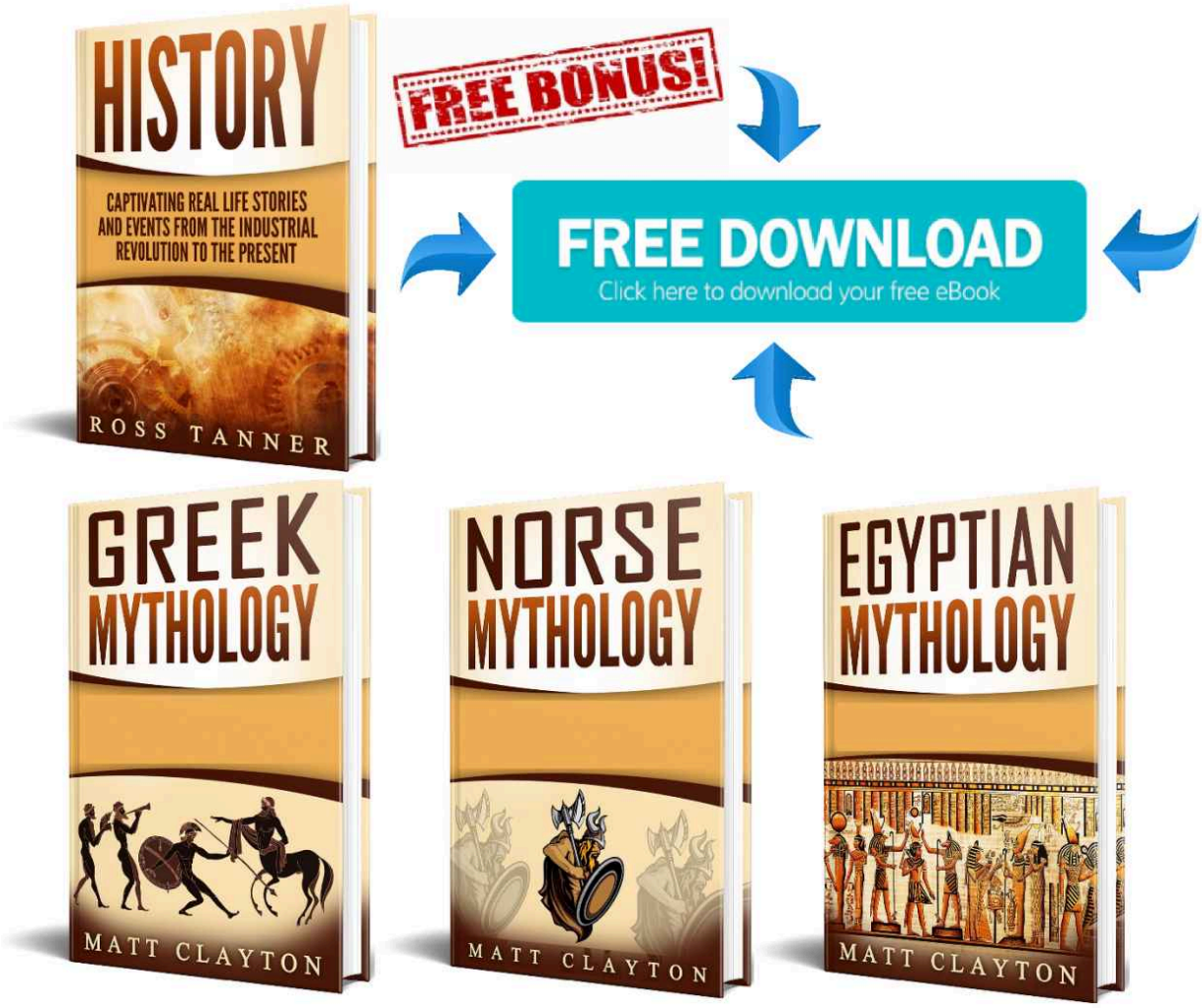

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Introduction

Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither was the Roman Empire. One of history's most powerful and influential realms established itself as a free and independent republic long before the likes of Julius Caesar and Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Great philosophers and intellectuals like Cicero and Lucretius graced the ancient paved roads of the Roman Republic nearly 2,000 years ago and helped build the reputation of that polity to be as equal to those of the Greeks.

As Rome swelled with tradespeople, artisans, slaves, and wealthy merchant families, its politicians struggled to maintain the fundamental democratic properties of the republican government. Rules were bent and broken, politicians and voters were bribed and lied to, and eventually, the power of Rome fell to the one man who could muster the respect and loyalty of the world-famous Roman army.

That man was Gaius Julius Caesar. A patrician and Populares of the Roman Republic, Caesar used the territorial threat of the Gauls of Western Europe to wage the Gallic Wars and seize ultimate power. His actions eradicated the democratic system, beginning the era of the ruthless tyranny of the Roman Empire in three continents.

Most of the historical record of this series of European wars comes from Julius Caesar himself. Caesar's book, the *Commentāriī dē Bellō Gallicō ,* more commonly known in English as *Commentaries on the Gallic War* , is his firsthand account of the wars, although it is written in the third-person narrative. He also made a habit of proudly boasting of his successful military campaigns in letters sent home to Rome.

Chapter 1 – Ancient Gaul

All Gaul is divided into three parts, one of which the Belgae inhabit, the Aquitani another, those who in their own language are called Celts, in our Gauls, the third. All these differ from each other in language, customs and laws.

(Julius Caesar, *Commentaries on the Gallic War*)

Ancient Gauls existed throughout most of Western and Central Europe during the Iron Age, starting in about 500 BCE. [1] More diverse than the writings of Julius Caesar perhaps suggest, the people of Gaul inhabited the lands of modern France, Belgium, and Luxembourg, as well as parts of the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, and Northern Italy. [2] The name "Gaul" was given to these people by the Romans, though most of them preferred to call themselves Celts, as did their cousins living on the British Isles.

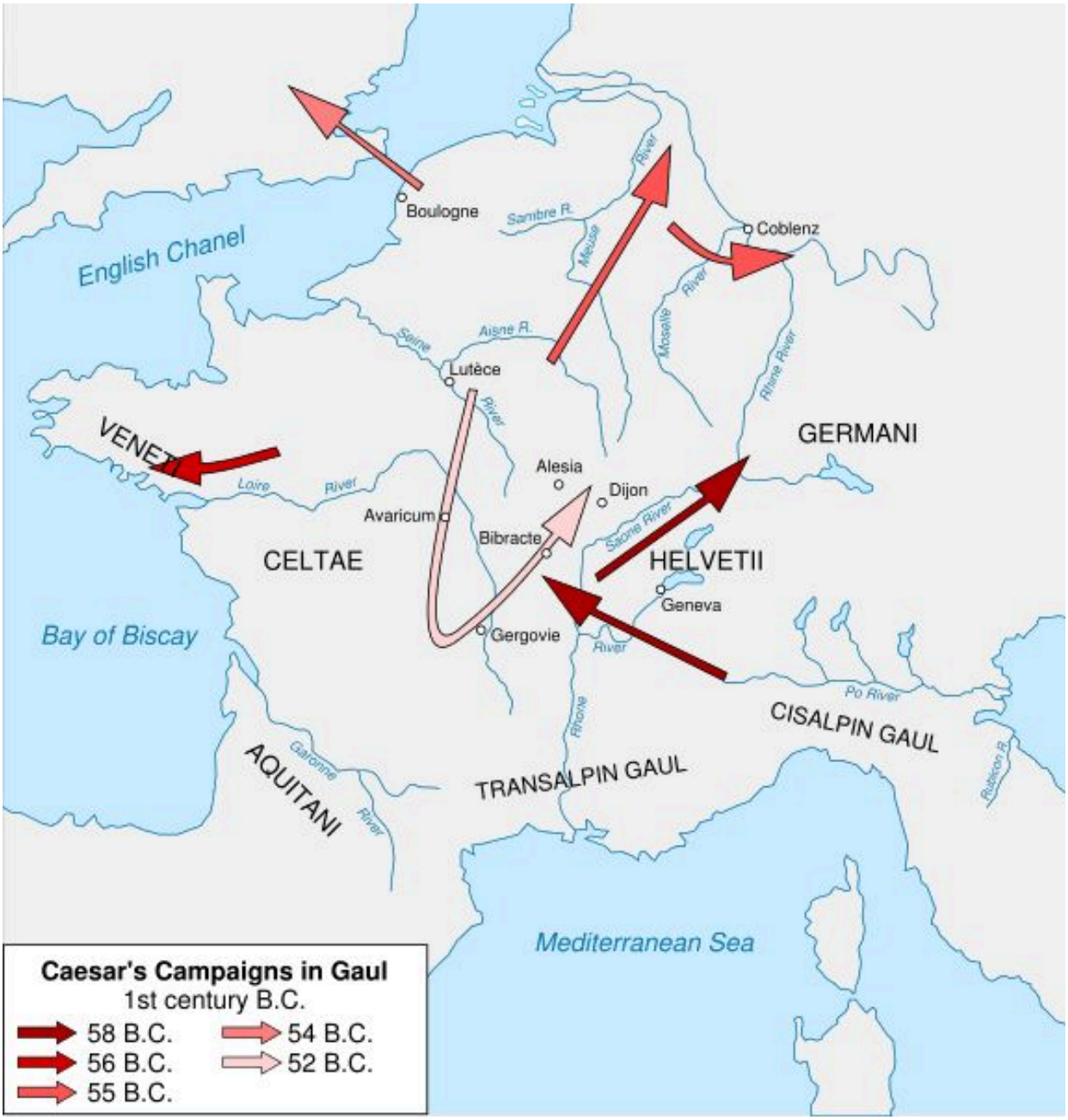
The Gauls were an agrarian people whose farming societies were divided into classes of laborers and landowners. The ruling class was fierce and expanded their territory at the expense of the neighboring Germanic tribes and the Roman Republic. By 390 BCE, the Gauls had settled along the northern Mediterranean coast, and a group of them called the Senones boldly moved in to sack Rome. [3] Led by a chieftain named Brennus, the invading tribe burned and plundered the city until both defenders and offenders were exhausted. The remaining Roman soldiers offered the Senones a tidy sum of gold to leave, and the proposal was accepted.

These Celtic tribes were known by several names depending on which region they lived in and who was naming them. The terms "Keltoi," "Celtae," "Celtini," and several others referred to the inhabitants of the different regions of Gaul. The commonalities that bound all the Celtic tribes of these regions together are still not completely known, but their fates would eventually unite them. They and their lands were a target for the Roman Empire and their conquests.

Without written historical information from this era, what is known about the Gauls mostly comes from what has been found in archaeology, some linguistic studies, and, more recently, through genetics. The information that has been gleaned from the remnants of the society shows that the Celtic tribes living in Gaul prior to the Gallic Wars had a successful agricultural society established. Animal husbandry was well developed with these people as well. Trading took place between the tribes in centers that were quite

urbanized for the time, and while the tribes kept their own social orders, they traded crafts, agricultural products, and tools consistently. The tribes were still considered to be in the act of expansion, and they were often at odds with each other over territory.

The following map indicates the primary route taken by Gaius Julius Caesar during the Gallic Wars.



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Chapter 2 - Gaius Julius Caesar

Veni, vidi, vici.

(Julius Caesar)

The Roman citizen Gaius Julius Caesar was born around 100 BCE to a wealthy and influential family. Part of the aristocratic patrician class, Caesar was born into a society that expected him to serve in the government and the military, as both bodies were considered the pillars of Roman civilization. First, however, as a privileged young boy, Julius Caesar was entitled to the very best education the Western world had to offer.

Young Caesar was tutored by Marcus Antonius Gnipho, a man who had been born free in Gaul before his parents sold him into slavery. [5] Classically educated and eventually freed by his owner, Gnipho set up a school in Rome and became a teacher to many of the Roman Republic's wealthy boys and even some girls. He taught Julius Caesar lessons in literature, rhetoric, oratory, Latin, and Greek, the latter of which was very in fashion among the elite Romans.

During Caesar's childhood and early adulthood, the Roman Republic was engaged in a power struggle with other kingdoms of Italy in what was called the Social War. Lasting from 91 to 88 BCE, the Social War was mostly caused by the refusal of the republic to grant citizenship to its outlying allies throughout Italy. [6] In ancient Rome, citizenship was highly prized and difficult to come by; only men over the age of 18 who had been born free in Rome to parents who were also born there were considered citizens. [7] Citizenship granted one the right to vote and serve in the government, and it was denied to women, children, slaves, and foreigners.

The Roman Republic was victorious in the Social War, but to avoid any such uprising again, it was forced to allow free men of at least 18 years in age who were born within the realm to claim citizenship. [8] The infighting was not finished in the capital city, however, and this time it had a personal impact on the Caesar family. Julius Caesar's uncle, Gaius Marius, and Marius' protégé, Lucius Cornelius Sulla, began a violent feud over their opposing political views. Marius was a Populares: he believed, like many other Romans, that the Senate must work in favor of the working and poor classes. By contrast, Sulla was an Optimate: he and other Optimates believed that the aristocratic and wealthy classes must be upheld, protected, and respected above all. [9]

In 82 BCE, Sulla defeated Gaius Marius the Younger, the son of Gaius Marius (who had died of natural causes in 86 BCE), and established himself as the dictator of Rome. [10] Though by law, Roman leaders—called consuls—were elected and served for only one year, dictatorship was a fail-safe in the republic that could be used in times of military emergencies. [11] As dictator, Sulla punished young Julius Caesar for his connection to Gaius Marius, calling upon him to resign his important position as the high priest of Jupiter and divorce his new wife, Cornelia Cinna. Caesar had no choice but to relinquish his position in the clergy, but he refused to go through with the divorce and instead fled the city with Cornelia. They stayed away, Caesar employed with the military, until Sulla's death in 78 BCE. [12] Since the dictatorial administration had already confiscated his family's wealth, Caesar had little to come back to, but he took on work as a lawyer to earn money and support himself. [13]

Julius Caesar proved to be a popular figure within Rome. He became famous for his public speeches, and within a few years of his return, Caesar was elected military tribune to the Roman Senate. The role involved meeting with government officials, speaking on behalf of the army, and voting on issues that affected the military. Tribunes like Caesar were also responsible for leading cohorts, the ancient Roman equivalent of a modern battalion. [14] The job was considered the first stepping stone into the heart of the Roman government, and that was a direction in which Julius Caesar decided he would like to travel. He made political allies who were also inclined toward the Populares ideology, and by 67 BCE, he had not only worked as quaestor in Hispania but had married, after the death of Cornelia, Pompeia, the granddaughter of Sulla. [15] , [16]

Seven years later, having served as the governor of a region in Hispaniola and gaining popularity within the political sphere, Caesar formed a pact with two other powerful men to wield the ultimate power of Rome between them. [17] The group, known as the First Triumvirate, included Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus, more commonly known as Pompey the Great, and Marcus Licinius Crassus. Pompey was a skilled general with experience in Rome's eastern realms, and Crassus was immensely wealthy due to the seizure and sale of lands that belonged to the late Sulla. [18] With their combined experience, the triumvirate had the funds, political knowledge, and social networks necessary to force their way to the top.

In 59 BCE, Caesar instructed his daughter, Julia, to marry Pompey to cement their political alliance. [19] Caesar was elected consul the same year, and to satisfy his allies, he granted free land to army veterans, as was requested from Pompey, and farmers received a tax break, which was requested by Crassus. For himself, the new Consul of Rome took over the governorship of both Cisalpine Gaul and Illyricum, regions he believed put him in a position to become very rich. Soon afterward, he was also granted the governorship of Transalpine Gaul. Both Cisalpine and Transalpine Gaul were in close proximity to Italy, lying on either side of the Alps.

It was the ideal situation for Julius Caesar. Initially, he planned to launch a campaign against Dacia, located in modern-day Romania, for the gold beneath its surface. However, an opportunity in Transalpine Gaul would draw his attention there instead. [20] His time in office was set for five years, and it promised to be full of opportunities for him.

However, this was the worst possible thing for the Celtic tribes of Western Europe.

Chapter 3 – The Helvetii Celts

There was no doubt that the Helvetii were the most powerful of the whole of Gaul.

(Julius Caesar)

The Helvetii were one of the Celtic tribes of Gaul. They had come from what is modern-day Southern Germany and were settled in what is current Switzerland up against the Alps. The Germanic tribes to the north and east posed some pressure to this group who had no room for expansion. In fact, their land claims had consistently been reduced by the Germanic tribes bordering them, and both the migrations and expansions were still creating stress between the groups.

Orgetorix, a Helvetii nobleman, persuaded his people around 61 BCE that migrating to the west coast would allow them to expand as needed. This migration would entail crossing the regions populated by other Gallic tribes who saw the migration as an invasion. Further complicating the plan, the coastal region Orgetorix had his eye set on for his people was already inhabited by the Aquitanians. Emissaries were sent to negotiate passage across the lands of neighboring tribes as the Helvetii prepared for the mass migration. Orgetorix's daughter was married to Dumnorix, a neighboring chieftain who aligned with Orgetorix and his ultimate plan for them to become the kings of their respective territories. Casticus, of the neighboring Sequani tribe, was similarly aligned with Orgetorix's plan.

Orgetorix's personal political plans to take over the Helvetii and become their absolute sovereign was discovered and foiled. He took his own life before a trial could take place, and so, when the migration did come to pass, its mastermind was no longer a part of the plan. Caesar notes his adversary's death in *Commentaries on the Gallic War* but gives no specific date as to when it happened. As for the Romans, they did not approve of the Helvetii plan to expand to the coast. The instability of this kind of expansion was thought to be a threat to the Romans who had established routes between the provinces of Italy and Spain. The Romans also disliked the idea of Germanic tribes moving farther into the area the Helvetii left behind them as it would increase their powerful kingdom even further.

Preparations for the big move took about three years, and during that time, crops were maximized in order to bring as much corn and supplies with them when they left. They amassed wagons and animals to pull them, and

these supplies were intended to last them throughout the three-month trek. As the migration began, there were other tribes, such as the Rauraci, the Latobrigi, and the Tulingi in Gaul, who decided to join the Helvetii. These groups were not as big as the original migrant group, but with their addition, the migrant group became the largest and most powerful in the whole of Gaul. According to Julius Caesar's account later, there were close to 370,000 people gathered together, including women and children.

The migrants were by no means a peaceful bunch of travelers. They pillaged as they moved across the landscape, consistently burning the villages they encountered, along with any food and valuables they were unable to take with them on their journey. It is believed this was to keep them focused on moving forward; if no villages were left behind, there would be nothing to distract the migrants in terms of potential real estate. It was the Mediterranean coast or nothing at all.

It was a fearful time for other tribes, who worried that their own families, belongings, and lands were at risk from the pillaging migrants. Julius Caesar's own account of these migrants is one of a brave and warlike people. He believed they were unlikely to have an uneventful journey or find peace with inhabitants and neighbors of their new destination—and that included the Roman Republic.

The Helvetii were destined for a major clash with the Romans as they moved toward the west in April of 58 BCE. [21] When Julius Caesar was informed of their approach into Roman territory, he was told the migrants had requested permission to cross it. Here, they faced their biggest obstacle and sent word to the Romans that they would move peacefully across that corner of the empire if they were allowed to pass through. [22] Caesar did not wish to grant such access, nor did he believe that the Helvetii migrants would maintain order if they were permitted to cross. Based on the destruction they left behind them, there was little reason to trust their word.

Caesar responded that their request would be considered. While he awaited a reply back, the governor quickly gathered his armed forces and headed to the place where the Helvetii and their amassed migrant allies wished to cross into Roman territory. Believing the migrants may try to pass without his permission, Caesar set up garrisons and fortifications to stop them from advancing. At the appointed date at which Caesar had promised an answer, the Helvetii were informed that passage would not be given. Furthermore, they were told that if they attempted to force their way across, they would be

met with resistance. Caesar's forces were strong and numerous, and the travelers had little choice but to change the path of their journey.

With passage through Caesar's province no longer an option, the Helvetii were left with only one option in reaching their destination on the coast: To go through the lands of the Sequani people, along the edge of the Jura Mountains. Thanks to Dumnorix's connection with the people of Sequani, he was able to convince them to allow the Helvetii to pass through their land without obstruction. In return, it was promised that the migrant train would not cause any harm as it passed. [23]

After passing through Sequani lands, the Helvetii arrived in the Aedui territory, where they immediately regressed to pillaging and burning. They plundered and ravaged the fields and towns, taking slaves and any supplies they wanted. The people of Aedui were helpless and had no defenses against this onslaught, and in a panic, they sent ambassadors to seek the help of Caesar and the Romans.

Chapter 4 – The Helvetian War

Delighted at the opportunity to flex his military muscles, Caesar organized his troops. He hadn't managed to invade Dacia as planned, but in answering the plea for help from the Aedui, Caesar had managed to goad the Roman Senate into allowing the ongoing warfare. This was not a decision that the senators took lightly, however. Rome had a policy of participating in defensive wars only, and any expansive warfare could only be allowed after overwhelming senatorial agreement that it was in the best interests of the Roman people themselves. The entire purpose of the electoral process and term limits for government employees was to stop would-be emperors from using Rome's might for his own purposes. Therefore, the senators begrudgingly allowed Caesar to fight the Helvetii in defense of the Aedui, but they tried to keep a very close eye on the proceedings.

Before moving off in pursuit of the migrants, Caesar made his way to Italy to obtain a sizeable, trained army to add to his existing forces. In all, he was given leadership over about 120,000 fighting men. These Roman soldiers were legally forbidden from marrying during their time with the army, and though officially expected to remain celibate over the course of their service, such things were impossible to enforce. Caesar's soldiers were a combination of Roman-born fighters and foreign-born men loyal to the Roman Republic. The latter were called "auxiliaries," and they only earned one-third the wages of the natural Roman citizens they fought beside. While most Roman soldiers spent the majority of their time training and serving as guards, Caesar's army could only find relief during the winter since it was normal to cease warfare during the cold months.

When Caesar and his army of warriors caught up to the Helvetii that June of 58 BCE, the latter were in the middle of a twenty-day expedition to cross the river Saône, near the middle of modern-day France. With a quarter of their numbers still on the eastern bank of the river within reach of the Roman army, Caesar struck in the middle of the night with three of his legions. [24] The migrants were routed, and in Caesar's letters home to the Senate, he claimed his own army put a bridge over the same river and crossed it in one day:

> This battle ended, that he might be able to come up with the remaining forces of the Helvetii, he procures a bridge to be made across the Saone, and thus leads his army over. The Helvetii, confused by his

> sudden arrival, when they found that he had effected in one day, what they, themselves had with the utmost difficulty accomplished in twenty namely, the crossing of the river, send embassadors [sic] to him. [25]

Politics were always on Caesar's mind, and he wanted to make sure that the people back in Rome had plenty of reasons to admire and support what he was doing in the northern territories. Fully aware that the senators would try to put an end to the military campaign as soon as the Helvetii threat had been dealt with, Caesar had to find a reason to continue moving forward with his army. His new goal was exactly what the traditional senators were afraid of: no less than the annexation of the rest of Gaul under Roman rule. To facilitate that goal, the governor decided to keep the senators—and the electorate, who hailed him as a hero—updated on all the complex reasons he must do battle outside Roman borders.

By Caesar's own account—although written in the third person—the Roman legions pursued the Helvetii quickly and effectively. Negotiations were attempted on the part of the migrants, but neither could agree on peaceful terms, so both parties rushed onward, moving westward. Low on supplies, Caesar ordered his army to stop at the allied city of Bibracte in June. The Helvetii used this pause as a chance to attack their pursuers from the rear, and as the Romans marched toward the city, the migrant forces followed them stealthily.

The Helvetii, however, were unable to pull off a surprise attack. Caesar's scouts saw them approaching, and once warned about his pursuers, Caesar ordered his cavalry unit to halt and form a wall. Farther beyond the mounted soldiers, the legions were dispersed. The legions with the most experience were placed strategically in a defensive line, while the two newer legions were ordered to flank their superiors upon a hilltop. [26]

The enemy broke through the cavalry line and moved in toward the Roman lines in a classic phalanx structure. [27] The phalanx, commonly used by the ancient Greeks, consisted of a densely packed rectangular arrangement of warriors. [28] Though the battle had been incited by the Helvetii, it was the Romans who threw the first javelins and began breaking up the enemy formation. The Helvetii were no strangers to warfare, and for a time, they managed to gain the upper hand by surrounding the Roman army. Caesar was forced to order a line of his men to about-face and deal with the

onslaught from the flank while the remainder continued to battle the bulk of the enemy army.

They fought bitterly throughout the afternoon and into the night until the Romans finally broke through the Helvetii camp and forced them to retreat. The surviving Helvetii moved on, while Caesar's legions stayed behind to rest for a full three days. They were by no means short of supplies since the retreating Helvetii had left most of their possessions behind. [29] A search of the goods revealed a document that tallied all the people involved in the mass migration. In total, Caesar wrote, there were 368,000 marked on the document. After a sufficient recuperation time, the Romans were up and marching once more in pursuit of the Helvetii. The next time they met, the latter surrendered.

Caesar was in charge of what would happen to the defeated migrants, along with the help of members of the Aedui tribe, and together, they decided that some members of the migrant group should be allowed to settle among the Aedui. These were the Boii, a people for whom the Aedui felt a certain kinship. [30] As for Caesar, he was happy to oblige since he did not feel comfortable leaving the uninhabited lands of the Aedui empty; once villages and farms were established, the new inhabitants could better defend it and keep out unwanted tribes.

As for the Helvetii, Tulingi, and Latobrigi, Caesar ordered them to return from whence they came. He wrote that of the reported 368,000 migrants who had tried to reach the western coast of Europe, only 110,000 returned home. To those reading his letters, there could be no doubt cast upon the magnificence of his victory.

Chapter 5 - Ariovistus, the German King

Ariovistus the king of the Germans, had settled in their territories, and had seized upon a third of their land, which was the best in the whole of Gaul, and was now ordering them to depart from another third part…The consequence would be that in a few years they would all be driven from the territories of Gaul, and all the Germans would cross the Rhine.

(Julius Caesar, *Commentaries on the Gallic War*)

The Roman Republic was not the only European force against whom the Gauls were forced to defend their territory and way of life. To the east of Gaul and the north of Italy proper, Germanic tribes ruled—and some of these also wanted a stake in the land claims of Gaul. One such ruler, Ariovistus, observed the events of 58 BCE shrewdly, plotting how to best take advantage of the situation. He decided to unite the Germanic tribes and Gauls together to fight back against the encroaching Roman Republic.

Ariovistus was not unknown to the people of Gaul, as some had come to him for help in an earlier war against the Aedui. Because of his previous alliance with the Arverni and Sequani people of Gaul, Ariovistus was well positioned to incite an anti-Roman movement in Gallic lands. He was also in an ideal position to begin moving his own people into Gaul since both the local tribes and the watchful Romans were on officially friendly terms with him. Ariovistus had actually been bestowed with the titles of Friend of Rome and King of Germany in 59 BCE by the Roman Senate. [31] Caesar was quick to point this out when the two met face to face two years later to discuss terms.

As soon as Caesar and his legions had defeated the Helvetii and stopped the mass migration of their people, he was compelled to deal with a new mass group of migrants moving in from Germany. He'd received word that the German Suevi were fighting with the Aedui at the Vosges, so he set off some 280 kilometers (174 miles) northeast to confront them. Along the way, the Romans met with many Gauls in the villages where they stopped to procure grain and supplies, and they were repeatedly told of the immense stature and strength of their German opponents.

The Roman legions became distracted and terrified as these rumors flew through the ranks, and in Caesar's letters home, he described how many of his men requested permission to return to their homes. Others fell to tears at the thought of approaching Ariovistus and his army of giant men, and eventually, the morale of the legions was so downtrodden that even officers

began to tell Caesar the battle was not feasible. In *Commentaries on the Gallic War* , Caesar wrote:

> Some actually told Caesar that when he gave the order to strike the camp and advance, the men would not obey and would be too terrified to move. Observing the state of affairs, Caesar called a meeting to which the centurions of all offices and grades were summoned, and rated them severely for presuming to suppose that it was their business to inquire or even to consider where they were going, or on what errand.

Before engaging on the battlefield, Caesar and the German king Ariovistus exchanged a series of messages. The leaders met on horseback to parlay while their lines of cavalry faced one another, stones hurled regularly from the Germans toward the Romans. Caesar refused to let his soldiers be provoked into starting a fight then and there, but he also did not yield to the demands of Ariovistus to leave Gaul to its own devices.

Caesar was firm but diplomatic with the German king, acknowledging the political friendship the two of them enjoyed and calling upon Ariovistus to cease the movement of his people into Gaul. The reply from Ariovistus was incredulous; the German king told Caesar that the migration was his own business and Rome had no right to interfere. Caesar insisted that since the migrant Germans were engaging in pillage and warfare against the Aedui, it was his obligation as a governor and protector of Rome and its allies to move against the intruders. To this, Ariovistus claimed that it was his right as a king to conquer other people and demand taxation.

Caesar described Ariovistus as an overconfident leader, particularly in his belief that the Roman Senate would hold firm on its offer of friendship despite these violent forays into allied territory. Ariovistus went as far as to insinuate that if he killed Julius Caesar, he would even gain the loyalty of many members of the Senate. The parlay came to an end quickly after that, and Caesar made haste to leave with his cavalry as the German side had become more unruly during the discussion and seemed ready to instigate war at any second.

The next day, Ariovistus sent word to Caesar that he desired another parlay. Weary and untrusting of his rival, the governor instead sent two of his men, Gaius Valerius Procillus and Marcus Mettius, to meet with the king. When Procillus and Mettius saw the Germans preparing their battle lines, they were captured and put in chains.

Caesar prepared over the next few days to meet Ariovistus in battle, but the German lines refused to present themselves. Apparently, it was the strategy of the opposing king to move slightly forward each day, stealthily line by line, only engaging in small fights without bringing forth the bulk of his army. More importantly, he placed some of his own troops across the supply line of the Romans, cutting off their food and water resources. By forcing the Romans to engage in small skirmishes over the following days, Ariovistus ensured that his enemy was hungry and tired for the real battle.

Caesar postulated that the reason the Germans would not engage in proper battle during that time was due to them having been warned by their wise women that they should not fight before the new moon. That may or may not have been true, but the fact was that Ariovistus had more troops, and they had the Romans surrounded. Ariovistus, therefore, had the luxury of attacking whenever he pleased.

The Roman leader was outnumbered and cut off from the supplies, but he had yet to run out of food. He knew that he must force the Germans to fight immediately to avoid being starved into defeat or surrender. Using his best lines of men as a shield some 550 meters (600 yards) from the German camp, Caesar ordered a secondary Roman camp to be built. He stationed two of his legions there and four at the original camp. The next day, auxiliary units provided cover while all six legions crept up into a battle line, *triplex acies* formation. *Triplex acies* was a classic Roman military tactic, in which the veteran warriors were placed in the third battle line to act as a barrier and anchor. If the first two ranks became overwhelmed, they could fall back behind the veteran lines and regroup or retreat in the most orderly fashion possible.

In this formation, the Roman army advanced on the German camp. Quickly, Ariovistus' men formed a phalanx, moving in front of a wagon train full of women and children. Caesar remarked that this was standard military operation for the Germans and speculated that it was meant to be motivational, as the women and children screamed and sobbed as the fighting ensued.

The Germans responded to the advancement of the legions so quickly, wrote Caesar, that the Romans had no time to throw their javelins. The soldiers dropped their long-range weapons and brandished their swords, engaging immediately in hand-to-hand combat. Some of the men in the Roman front

lines jumped onto the Germans' shield wall to pry the defensive instruments out of the hands of their enemies and stab them to death from above.

Ultimately, Caesar's forces were victorious. The Germans were routed, and those who could still escape ran 24 kilometers (15 miles) to the Rhine River, crossing it by boat or by swimming. Procillus and Mettius, who had remained in chains for the duration of the battle, were removed and joyfully welcomed back into the Roman ranks. Thousands of German men, women, and children were left behind and taken prisoner by Caesar's men. This proved to be the best prize of all since Caesar could sell them as slaves at an incredible profit to himself.

In the aftermath of the Battle of Vosges, the German migrants returned to their homeland, and it seems that Ariovistus lost his authority there. He died just a few years later due to unclear circumstances.

Chapter 6 – Battle of the Sabis

Of all these [Gauls] the Belgae are the bravest, because they are furthest from the civilization and refinement of [our] Province.

(Julius Caesar)

Having successfully been engaged in two important campaigns during his first year as governor of Transalpine and Cisalpine Gaul, Caesar stationed his legions with the Sequani for the winter to give them their due rest. It was customary for the generals of his day to do battle only in the warmer months of the year, so he left his troops under the authority of Titus Labienus and took his own refuge elsewhere in Hither Gaul. There, Caesar received repeated reports from various sources that the Belgic people of far northern Gaul were conspiring against him.

The Belgae were an agricultural people, many of whom had migrated across the English Channel into Iron Age Britannia. There, they helped revolutionize farming with their heavy plow, as well as introduced the potter's wheel to the people living there. [32] Originally of Germanic heritage, the Belgae still shared a border with Germania. It is unclear how long they had been living in the western part of Europe, but it had to have been a significant amount of time for Caesar to relate to them as Gallic instead of Germanic.

When the weather grew warm again in the summer of 57 BCE, Caesar raised two more legions in Cisalpine Gaul. [33] While he waited for these additional troops to finish their training, Caesar sent envoys to the Gallic people with whom he was allied and found that they all reported the Belgae were gathering an army against him. Upon hearing this news, Caesar gathered his men from their winter retreat and marched upon the new enemy.

Realizing that the Belgae had loyalties divided into a variety of sub-groups, Caesar considered his strategy while assembling his men. If he could avoid a battle against the entire unified force of the Belgae, whom he had heard numbered among 300,000, his own odds of an easy victory increased greatly. Caesar therefore ordered the forces of the Aedui to attack the Bellovaci while he prepared to meet with the remaining bulk of the enemy troops. On the banks of the Aisne River, the Romans made their camp and placed guards at the bridge by which they were to receive provisions. The camp was fortified by a high rampart and a wide ditch.

The Belgae began their march upon the nearby town of Bibrax, and after a day of siege upon the walls and fortifications of the community, they halted for the night and slunk back to their camp. Caesar noted that they laid siege in the same style as the Germans. Upon night falling, messengers from Bibrax ran to Caesar's camp and urged him to send a relief force to the town for the next day's expected siege. He complied, supplying the defensive forces of the Remi tribe with archers and slingers.

The influx of these Roman warriors into Bibrax changed the course of the attacking Belgae, who then determined to leave the town and merely burn and pillage the surrounding area. Once they were satisfied with that, they moved onto Caesar's camp and made their own camp within about two miles of the Romans. Caesar remarked in his letters that the smoke from the enemy campfires indicated that their camp was at least eight miles wide.

The obvious size of the enemy encampment gave Caesar pause. He considered whether there was some way he could refuse the oncoming battle and spare himself what would likely be considerable losses. Before making a firm decision one way or the other, Caesar sent his cavalry to fight in a series of small-scale skirmishes to ascertain which side had superior technique and prowess. It was a move very similar to the one used on the Romans by Ariovistus the previous year, and it served to convince Caesar that his own forces did indeed have the strength to overcome the Belgae.

Determinedly, Caesar prepared his battlegrounds. The space between the two army encampments contained a shallow hill upon which he envisioned his six legions. He would station the two newest legions trained in Cisalpine Gaul at the camp while entreating the enemy to surround his veterans on the hill. His newest soldiers could flood in from the flank if it proved necessary. Having dug a series of trenches on either side of the hill, the general was ready.

The Belgic army made its first move, and instead of placing itself within the prepared grounds, they attempted to cross the Aisne some distance from Caesar's camp. In doing so, they hoped to cut off the Romans' supply chain at the bridge and lay waste to the villages of the Remi who were supplying the Romans. Caesar ordered some of his number in the direction of the bridge, and after what he described as a "severe struggle," he was successful in fighting off the enemy and keeping the supply line and bridge encampment secure. The Belgae were forced to withdraw entirely to their own lands.

While the Belgae retreated, Caesar followed them several days while attacking sporadically from the rear. Along the route, he decided to take advantage of their passing close by an undefended town called Noviodunum so that his soldiers could take it by force. The town quickly surrendered and gave hostages to Caesar so that he would allow them to keep their home in peace. As the Belgae continued to make haste for their home, the Romans continued to sack Gallic towns as they saw fit, stopping only to confer with their friends, the Aedui and the Remi.

Chapter 7 - The Germanic War

They have plundered the world, stripping naked the land in their hunger… they are driven by greed, if their enemy be rich; by ambition, if poor… They ravage, they slaughter, they seize by false pretenses, and all of this they hail as the construction of empire. And when in their wake nothing remains but a desert, they call that peace.

(Tacitus, *The Agricola and The Germania*)

In the year 55 BCE, Caesar's two political allies were simultaneously elected for the post of Roman consul, a position that was always proffered in pairs. With both Pompey and Crassus at the head of the government, the *Lex Trebonia* law was passed to grant both consuls a five-year governorship of Spain and Syria, respectively. [34] For Julius Caesar, the consuls granted a five-year extension to his original governorship of the provinces of Cisalpine Gaul, Transalpine Gaul, and Illyricum. While Crassus made ready to invade Parthia and Pompey built Rome's first permanent theater, Caesar was engaged once more with invading Germans.

It was the Usipetes and Tencteri tribes this time who made their way across the Rhine River intent on finding land to settle for themselves in Gaul. Their migrations were pressed by the continued attacks of the Suevi in Germany, whose endless harassment made the fundamental industry of agriculture quite difficult. Caesar described the Suevi as the most fearsome group of Germania, with legions upon legions of warriors and an annual habit of sending a thousand armed men into the world for the sole purpose of warfare.

Caesar may have had a small amount of empathy for the fleeing tribes of the Usipetes and Tencteri, but it was not enough to allow them to settle in Gaul. Determining to not allow the Gauls to settle the matter among themselves, Caesar returned to the army from his winter retreat to take on the fresh wave of German migrants. Once there, he found that certain Gauls had been in contact with the migrants and had promised them that all their needs would be met after crossing the Rhine. Of course, this would be at the detriment of the Gallic tribes who had not entered into such negotiations.

Caesar summoned the leaders of the Gallic tribes to a meeting where he impressed upon them the need for unity and defensive tactics. Feigning ignorance to the previous political alliances that had been made between some of those leaders and the Usipetes and Tencteri, Caesar easily led

everyone assembled to the conclusion that they would band together. This way, the governor was careful to avoid provoking a clash between members of the meeting who had previously endangered the others; it was both a move to unite Gaul against its enemies and under the leadership of Roman authority.

Supplies were gathered and the warriors were readied before Caesar led them out to meet the Germans. Upon doing so, he received an envoy from the enemy ranks who delivered the following message:

> The Germans neither make war upon the Roman people first, nor do they decline, if they are provoked, to engage with them in arms; for that this was the custom of the Germans handed down to them from their forefathers, to resist whatsoever people make war upon them and not to avert it by entreaty…they had come hither reluctantly, having been expelled from their country. If the Romans were disposed to accept their friendship, they might be serviceable allies to them; and let them either assign them lands, or permit them to retain those which they had acquired by their arms; that they are inferior to the Suevi alone, to whom not even the immortal gods can show themselves equal; that there was none at all besides on earth whom they could not conquer.

Caesar responded that there was not enough land to offer them any without hindering the existing communities within Gaul but that they might try to move into the Ubii lands and help that people defend it from the Suevi. The envoys agreed to entreat the Ubii to such an arrangement, asking that Caesar not advance his army or attack them until word could be sent back in reply. Caesar agreed only to advance far enough to find water for his troops, but he allowed his cavalry to march ahead with orders not to provoke a fight. He remarks in his letters that once the Germans saw the cavalry approach, they began to attack.

The battle was short-lived but provocative. More than 70 of the Romans' horses were killed by the enemy, as well as a number of the mounted warriors. [35] Many of their horses, riderless and terrified, galloped back from where they had come and met upon Caesar and the rest of his troops a few miles beyond the battlefield. Furious, Caesar readied himself and the legions to prepare for war the next day.

Before any retaliatory movement could be made, however, a large gathering of Germans approached Caesar's camp peacefully. Comprised of people

whom Caesar described as “princes and old men,” these people apologized profusely for the attack and claimed to have had no part in it. Furthermore, they wished for peace and the chance to negotiate properly. Unbelieving of the same rhetoric this second time, Caesar had the men arrested and started to have the troops march forward the eight miles to where the enemy still stood. According to his letters, there were more than 400,000 Germans assembled there, including women and children among the wagons and baggage.

The German camp was in a tumult and completely unprepared for such a swift attack. Though some of their warriors were able to find weapons and fight for a time, it was not enough. The Romans beat them back decisively until they fled in all directions, many hurling themselves in the Rhine in an attempt to escape. Without losing a single Roman soldier, Caesar turned from the emptied camp and returned to his own, telling the imprisoned Germans there that they were free to follow their own people if they wished. None did so.

While the Romans rested and the freed Germans reflected on the turn of events, Caesar considered how best to follow up the day’s battle. He’d seen the same circumstances repeat itself again and again, and he observed that there must be some way to convince the people in Germania to stay on their side of the Rhine. Thus, he conceived of a plan to follow his enemy into Germania and stop the invasions at their source. To that end, the Romans marched after their surviving foes and crossed into Germania, having procured the promise of ships from the allied Ubii people.

The foes on the other side of the border were keen horsemen, noted Caesar, and they were able to take sickly animals and turn them into healthy, valuable workers. In Caesar’s letters to the Roman Senate, he told his audience how the German horses were so well trained that they would stand still in place during battle after their rider had jumped into the fray, awaiting his return. Aware that his own cavalry was outmatched, Caesar had to rely on the expertise of his infantry. He bade his legions to build a bridge over the Rhine and move over it during a ten-day process before then moving confidently into Germania.

Pressing eastward, Caesar frequently met with envoys asking for peace between the Romans and their own communities. To these, Caesar had only one answer: Send hostages and the alliance will be made. [36] Hostages were his preferred method of cementing friendships, particularly with new

acquaintances. The more important the hostage, the more serious the claim of peace from the foreign tribe.

Germans near the Rhine had already seen the retreating Tencteri and Usipetes warriors, however, and they were quick to desert their communities and go into hiding to avoid confrontation. Caesar did not care where the Germans were hiding; he meant only to strike fear into their hearts so that they would not even think of crossing into Gaul anytime soon. Any thought of conquest and rule in those lands was probably negated by the fact that the area was so politically divided, poor in precious metals, and, by Roman standards, simply barbaric. The Romans burned all the villages and homes they could find, and after 18 days in Germania, they returned home and cut down the bridge they'd used to get there. [37]

Chapter 8 – United Gaul Versus Caesar of Rome

Two years passed in which neither Pompey, Crassus, or Caesar were elected as consuls; however, they were all still employed as governors within their respective provinces. In 52 BCE, Pompey had been made consul once more, but Crassus had been killed in his own military campaign against Parthia. In Gaul, a great revolt had been building against Caesar—and by extension, Rome—at the hands of Vercingetorix.

Vercingetorix became the leader of the Gallic Arverni tribe that very same year, and he had one pressing goal in mind: the expulsion of Rome from Gallic lands. He took pains to convince his people and kingly peers that they must shake off the dominance of the Romans. Seeking sovereignty in Gaul, Vercingetorix stepped up to lead a rebellion. It was a difficult time for Caesar, who had planned to keep his legions resting in their winter quarters for several more weeks. But on the other hand, he did not want to lose the kinship of the Aedui by allowing them to become overrun with revolutionary Gauls with whom they were not united.

Furthermore, Caesar could not be sure to what degree the followers of Vercingetorix gave their loyalty. Vercingetorix was the son of a slain Gallic king who had been killed by his own people for the dishonorable ambition of ruling over all the tribes. After the death of his father, Vercingetorix had been exiled from his homeland for a short time before supporters welcomed him back. Vercingetorix immediately expelled his enemies from Arverni and gathered an army. If he had the same intentions as his father—and it very well seemed that he might—then perhaps he might fail by his own hand without Caesar having to do a thing.

Caesar chose to bring all but two of his legions to meet Vercingetorix's men in battle. Desiring a decisive fight, Caesar knew he would have to draw out the enemy leader and force him to procure all his warriors. To lure out his opponent, Caesar sacked the towns of Vellaunodunum, Genabum, and Noviodunum on his way to Gergovia, the realm's capital city which lay in modern-day central France. In the latter, he collected hostages, horses, and weapons from the towns' citizens in exchange for peace and an alliance. As planned, Vercingetorix moved to meet Caesar's forces near Noviodunum.

When the people of the town spotted their king's cavalry in the distance, they rejoiced and quickly abandoned the peace they had negotiated with the Romans. Fortifying themselves, the Noviodunumites grabbed what remained

of their weaponry, but Caesar's centurions—still in the process of carrying out the seizure of weapons—were able to escape unharmed. Caesar sent out his own cavalry to meet that of Vercingetorix's and succeeded in turning the enemy line back to seek out its main body. As the Gallic cavalry retreated, the townspeople once more surrendered to Caesar, quickly offering hostages to him.

Vercingetorix called his advisors for a strategy meeting and decided to make it impossible for the traveling Roman army to feed and sustain itself within Gaul. On the orders of Vercingetorix, dozens of unfortified villages were burned to the ground to prevent Caesar's army from sacking them for foodstuffs to feed their soldiers and horses. Towns with fortifications and the means to protect themselves were left to stand only if the king believed they were capable of withstanding a siege.

This action did indeed leave the Romans with little food. Corn was their main food supplement, which they had been receiving from the Aedui and Boii peoples, but with their own villages burned and stores pillaged, those tribes could scarcely feed themselves. [38] Before hunger got the better of his army, Caesar marched his legions to the large town of Avaricum. Still standing, thanks to its defensive architecture, Avaricum nevertheless fell to the Roman siege and provided Caesar's army with all the supplies they needed to replenish their stocks. At long last, the Romans set off for Gergovia.

Gergovia was not an easy target. The city stood 1,200 feet high on the plateau of a mountain overlooking a large plain. The plateau was 2.2 kilometers (1.5 miles) in length by 535 meters (1,755 feet) in width, and there was only one entrance. The city could be defended by a relatively small guard thanks to its physical location, a feature that Vercingetorix had been relying on to keep it safe.

Guessing that his enemy was headed to the capital, Vercingetorix placed his troops on the opposite side of the river Elave, the modern-day Loire River, as the Romans and moved with the enemy, burning all of the bridges before Caesar could reach them and access Gergovia. When Caesar saw the succession of burning bridges, he formulated a plan to trick the enemy and gain access. First, he split his entire army into two parts, the first of which contained two-thirds of the men and the second of which contained the remaining third. He ordered the largest to continue marching south while the third hid from sight. When the troops on the other side of the river had

moved on, the remaining Romans hurriedly rebuilt the bridge. When it was ready, Caesar sent for the rest of the troops and pushed ahead, across the river.

Despite managing to cross the river, Caesar's army was beaten back into retreat by that of Vercingetorix and an Aedui group that had switched allegiance. Caesar managed to convince the Aedui to rejoin him and lay siege to Gergovia, but their combined forces could not gain the high ground. With supplies running low once more, Rome was forced to retreat into Aedui territory.

Chapter 9 – The Battle of Alesia

By September of 52 B.C., Caesar was about to conquer of all of Gaul with one final siege and battle, the Siege of Alesia.

(Joseph M. Durante) [39]

After the success of the Gauls at Gergovia, Caesar abandoned his plan to invade the capital. Instead, he followed his enemy to another fortified city, that of Alesia, in order to defeat them there. It was the summer of 52 BCE when the two armies met at Alesia, and the army of the Gallic king had been much enhanced following his great victory at Gergovia. Unfortunately for Vercingetorix, however, Caesar had already defeated his cavalry upon approaching the city.

In Caesar's letters home, he said that he camped outside the city and performed a great deal of reconnaissance upon its fortifications before coming up with a plan of attack. The Gauls were terrified, Caesar went on, since their skilled cavalry had been broken and he was now camped within sight of the walls. Like Gergovia, the city of Alesia was perched on the top of a high hill and did not present an easy challenge. In making preparations for war, the Romans camped at the foot of the hill for several months.

Caesar's strategy involved what he called circumvallation. The method was characterized by encircling a city with a series of defensive forts so as to make it impossible for citizens within the circle to send messages or receive supplies. [40] At the foot of the hill of Alesia, the Romans built 23 outposts around a total distance of 18 kilometers (11 miles). [41] Each small fort could hold a sentry soldier, and these guards were refreshed regularly. The outposts were occupied all day and all night, and the plain stretching out beyond the Roman camp was defended by hired German mercenaries and cavalry.

The Gauls were not simply standing aside and waiting for the Romans to finish surrounding the city with fortified camps, but they had a great deal of trouble attacking the circumvallation without giving away an entrance to Alesia. Skirmishes were fought continuously, but despite this, the building project moved forward. Seeing that his troops were unable to shift the Romans from their purpose, Vercingetorix sent members of his cavalry out from the city to return to their home states and try to find more willing men to join the fight. According to Caesar, by that time the Gauls within Alesia had barely enough supplies of corn to feed them for 30 days. He wrote home

that he learned such private information about his enemy from the deserters of the Gallic army.

While the enemy cavalry was abroad gathering reinforcements and more food, Caesar set some of his own men to the task of digging trenches to surround the city. When they were complete, he connected them to the river and thereby constructed a considerable moat. On the bank of the moat, he built ramparts nearly 4 meters (12 feet) in height, complete with battlements that had sharp stakes to prevent enemy climbers. To stave off the Gauls from preventing all this work from happening, more trenches were dug, in which stakes were set, pointing upwards. Any foray into the trench would likely result in impalement.

Within the month, the Gauls were running out of food. They sent out the aged men, the sick people, women, and children from the city to save resources for the fighting men within. Caesar wrote that he believed the Gauls wanted him to feed these people and keep them under his authority, but he didn't allow them into his fortifications. They were forced to fend for themselves and look for shelter elsewhere.

It was early September 52 BCE before the Romans and the Gauls met in the ultimate battle for Alesia. The Gallic reinforcements had arrived, and Caesar was provided with relief legions brought by his fellow Romans, Marc Antony and Gaius Trebonius. The numbers probably totaled about 75,000 fighting for Rome and 80,000 for Vercingetorix. [42]

The Gauls focused their attacks on the weak spots of the Roman fortifications, which lay on the north side of the surrounding hills. It was a lengthy process thanks to the multitude of trenches that lay between the city wall and the surrounding forts, which had the desired effect of giving the Romans time to cut the enemy forces down as they attempted to advance. Ultimately, the Gauls were trapped within the limits of Alesia, and despite having the higher ground, there was no way to beat back the Roman legions.

Caesar's, Antony's, and Trebonius' legions were forced to fight the Gauls within the city and also those surrounding them and their ramparts. It was an almost impossible feat, but thanks to the extensive preparations and painstakingly constructed trenches, towers, ramparts, and forts, Caesar proved victorious at last. While Roman soldiers slaughtered the cavalry and outlying armies of Vercingetorix ceaselessly, deserters fled the city in droves.

Vercingetorix finally admitted defeat on October 3, 52 BCE, and instructed his people to offer him up to Caesar as a war prize. [43] Caesar received his customary hostages happily and in doing so brought an end to the most prominent of the Gallic revolutions against him. Vercingetorix was taken to Rome, where he was imprisoned lavishly at Caesar's expense for almost six years before being executed. [44]

Chapter 10 - Crossing the Rubicon

On January 10, 49 B.C., on the banks of the Rubicon River in southern Gaul (near the modern-day city of Ravenna), Julius Caesar and the soldiers of the 13th Legion waited and weighed their options.

(*National Geographic History* [45])

The large-scale Gallic revolts had come to an end, but Caesar's pacification of Gaul was not without its share of local protestations. There were uprisings by the Carnutes and Bellovaci in 51 BCE, during which the Roman Army lay siege to the city of Uxellodunum. Back in Rome, tensions rose between Caesar and Pompey as their political alliance came to an uncomfortable end. Caesar's daughter and Pompey's wife, Julia, had died three years earlier and left Pompey with little reason to continue his controversial support of Julius Caesar and the Gallic Wars.

Switching political sides, Pompey had ceased to support the Populares ideals for government and began to promote those of the Optimates. He and Caesar were officially at odds, and that left Caesar without either of his original allies from the First Triumvirate. Marc Antony became his most important ally at that point, but neither of them could beat the authority of Pompey the Great in Rome. Pompey and the Senate, having decided that Caesar held command over too many Roman soldiers, demanded that he give up two of his legions. Pompey claimed to need those two legions for the war against the Parthians, which had been ongoing in the eastern provinces since 66 BCE. If Caesar agreed, the Senate would allow him to run for consul in 48 BCE. [46]

It was important that Caesar become consul that year because his term as governor of Gaul was nearly done. If he found himself without a governorship or a consulship, he would return to Rome as a citizen with no authority and therefore be at the mercy of his many enemies within the Senate. Though Caesar continued to enjoy high popularity with the Roman public, he had powerful enemies in the government who believed he had committed a series of war crimes in Gaul. If they had their way, Caesar could be executed.

Knowing that his main political enemy was Pompey, Caesar told the Senate that he would willingly give up his legions if Pompey did the same. Though the proposition was considered, it did not go forward. While he considered

his options though, Caesar formally unified the communities he'd conquered in Gaul under Roman rule and extended the map of the Roman Republic. [47]

With the Roman Senate urging him to give up his governorship and return to Rome, Julius Caesar faced a tough choice. The Triumvirate was gone; he could no longer rely on the clever politicking of Pompey the Great on his behalf. Returning to Rome as a citizen with no army meant that Caesar would be tried and punished by the Senate for war crimes against the Gauls and for disobedience to the Senate and Roman law. He'd lose everything and probably be executed by the state, despite his popularity among the plebeians of Rome. On the other hand, to keep his power and territory, there was only one option: remain with the army he'd cultivated in Gaul.

The Rubicon River beckoned and, just across it, the official territory of the Roman Republic. To enter Rome with a foreign army was instantly indicative of war, and Caesar knew this all too well. This action specifically declared war on the Senate and could be considered treason and an invasion of Italy. Caesar also knew that, thanks to the way the Roman military worked, his legions had developed a loyalty toward him and not to the Senate. Some of his soldiers had been serving under his command for ten years, and they were happy to follow him into whatever challenge he deemed appropriate.

In January of 49 BCE, Caesar's active legion, the XIII, followed him to the Rubicon in the frigid, snowy air of winter and awaited their instructions. [48] The rest of his forces, as many as eight legions, were still positioned in Gaul. [49] Finally, the war hero made his decision; they crossed the freezing stream of water and unofficially declared war on their own government. Anxious to meet his challengers face to face, Caesar led his loyal warriors straight to Rome, apparently stating that "the die is cast."

Chapter 11 - Caesar's Civil War

Men in public life did their best to avoid accidental events or actions from being seen as unlucky. On a famous occasion during the civil war, Caesar tripped when disembarking from a ship on the shores of Africa and fell flat on his face. With his talent for improvisation, he spread out his arms and embraced the earth as a symbol of conquest. By quick thinking he turned a terrible omen of failure into one of victory.

(Anthony Everitt) [50]

The confrontation known as the Great Roman Civil War, or Caesar's Civil War, came to be known as the culmination of the internal strife within the Roman Republic which changed the republic into the Roman Empire.

The Senate assumed that there would be troops sent from Italy's towns in response to Caesar's march toward them. They believed that the people supported the Senate and its authority over Italy; there was, however, little senatorial support and Italy's communities outside of Rome proper were disinclined to send their soldiers and resources to the capital for the impending political fight.

The stakes were high for the soldiers backing Caesar; if the campaign failed, they were certain to lose their military pensions for committing treason. [51] As an incentive, Caesar doubled the salaries for his soldiers. [52] With this military support, combined with the lack of support for the Senate, Caesar was able to continue his march toward Rome, entering the capital of the republic for the first time in ten years.

Pompey had promised the senators and the public that if Caesar did dare to march south with his army, he would assemble his own legions and protect the republic. Unfortunately, he could not gather enough troops on such short notice, and Caesar's single legion occupied Rome as Pompey retreated to the nearby southern city of Capua. He did not wait for Caesar to meet him at Capua; he and his soldiers retreated and headed across the Adriatic Sea to prepare their battle strategies in Macedonia.

Pompey probably expected that Caesar would pursue him there, but in fact, Caesar moved in the opposite direction toward Spain. On the way, he moved back through Gaul where he gathered some more of his legions for the war. Once in Spain, Caesar attacked Pompey's forces in the absence of their governor in 49 BCE. In a series of maneuvers designed to cut the Roman

soldiers from Spain off from their sources of food and water, Caesar successfully wore out his opponents. They surrendered and were disbanded. [53] Having forcibly removed his most authoritative critics from Italy and Spain, Caesar returned to Rome that same year. There he was appointed as dictator, oversaw his own election to be a consul again, and resigned his dictatorship, all within the span of under two weeks. Perhaps an absurd turn of events for Pompey's senatorial supporters who wanted to strip Caesar of all his power, the election of a so-called warmonger as head of government occurred simply because Caesar had the majority of the popular vote. Julius Caesar was hailed as a war hero and a friend of the common people, in no small part thanks to his self-indulgent marketing campaign of letter-writing during the Gallic Wars. Furthermore, the people of Rome were terrified of war coming to their city and believed that by giving Caesar the title he sought, they were protecting their own interests.

Finally crossing the Adriatic Sea to meet Pompey's forces in Macedonia, Caesar led his army to Dyrrachium. [54] Caesar was at an immediate disadvantage because he had only enough ships to move half of his army at once. He had planned to move one half to the eastern side of the Adriatic and then send the ships back to Italy to pick up and deliver the remaining half; however, Pompey's soldiers managed to cut off these ships from performing the second step. Not only did this leave Caesar without half of his army, but it cut him off from his supply stations in Italy. Pompey was the favored warlord of the east Adriatic, and therefore, it would not be possible to find food, water, and weapons among the people of Macedonia and nearby Greece. [55]

The following map illustrates the path Pompey took out of Italy to evade Caesar, as well as the path Caesar eventually took to follow him. [56]

Caesar's forces made several attempts to evade the naval blockade, but all were fruitless until Marc Antony managed to pass through and collect four more legions from Italy and land them at Nympheum. [57] Some miles north of Caesar's camp, Antony waited with the new troops while both Caesar and Pompey moved to meet him. As both parties were able to move northward swiftly, Pompey pulled back closer to Dyrrachium to avoid being caught between Antony and Caesar.

On the western coast of the battleground, Pompey still had the advantage over his enemy. His navy was larger and stronger, and at his back, he could see any approach from a distance thanks to the hilly landscape. Caesar began digging trenches and building fortifications immediately, but these were no surprise to his Roman opponent. Pompey ordered the same fortifications built beyond his own camp, creating a terrifying series of ditches and armed guard towers between the main bodies of both armies. On July 10, 48 BCE, the former members of the First Triumvirate fought their first head-to-head battle, the Battle of Dyrrachium. [58]

Though Caesar's tactics were strong and his men were experienced, he was betrayed by two defectors who told Pompey where to find the unfinished section of his opponent's wall. [59] Pompey attacked the spot and found it was indeed weaker than the rest of Caesar's fortifications. Reinforcements were sent swiftly, but Pompey had far more soldiers at his command than Caesar did, and eventually, the sheer multitudes of Pompey's forces forced the retreat of the Caesarion forces. They moved south and were not pursued by Pompey, who believed the retreat was a trick of Caesar's designed to lure him into a trap. [60]

The Battle of Dyrrachium was a victory for Pompey, although he did not realize it until it was too late to capitalize on his position. Had he ordered his soldiers to pursue the retreating army of Caesar, he may have forced them to surrender, forever changing the course of history. In reality, Caesar regrouped at Pharsalus and decisively defeated Pompey's forces there. Defeated, Pompey the Great fled to Egypt, and his legions dispersed.

Officers of the ruling Egyptian king, Ptolemy XIII, had Pompey killed in September of 48 BCE. [61] Caesar arrived shortly afterward to speak with his old ally, and upon finding him dead, he began to interfere with the Egyptian civil war that was brewing. With no serious contenders for the consulship of Rome other than Pompey's own nemesis, Julius Caesar was elected head of the Roman Republic in 46 and 45 BCE, and in 44 BCE, he was made dictator for life. Thanks to his military prowess and ambition, Caesar had added all of Gaul to the republic and earned the loyalty of Romans and the respect of foreign warlords and kings. The Gallic Wars were his crowning glory and the reason for his ongoing dictatorship of a nation that was supposed to be a fiercely proud republic.

Epilogue

Julius Caesar's popularity was due to the love of two different people of Rome: the plebeians and the army. His reputation with the aristocrats of the Roman Republic was very poor, and this negativity led to his downfall. In the final year of Caesar's dictatorship, a group of Optimates within the Senate conspired together to restore the republican ideals of Rome. More than sixty senators agreed to a vicious plan to divert power from Julius Caesar and back to the Senate, and on March 15, 44 BCE, it was put into motion.

At the hands of dozens of senators, Gaius Julius Caesar was stabbed to death 23 times near the Theatre of Pompey in Rome. [62] Marc Antony was strategically detained in conversation nearby so that he was not at the side of his friend during the attack. It was ironic that after eight long years in Gaul and six years of civil war, it was not an enemy army who ended the life of the great Caesar but a group of politicians.

The assassination of Rome's dictator was meant to restore the republic, but that was not to be. Marc Antony formed the Second Triumvirate with Caesar's heir and grand-nephew, Gaius Octavius Thurinus, and another of Caesar's close friends, Marcus Aemilius Lepidus. The Second Triumvirate hunted down Caesar's murderers and put them to death. A renewed civil war followed until finally, in 27 BCE, Caesar's heir became the first Emperor of Rome, ruling by the name of Caesar Augustus. [63]

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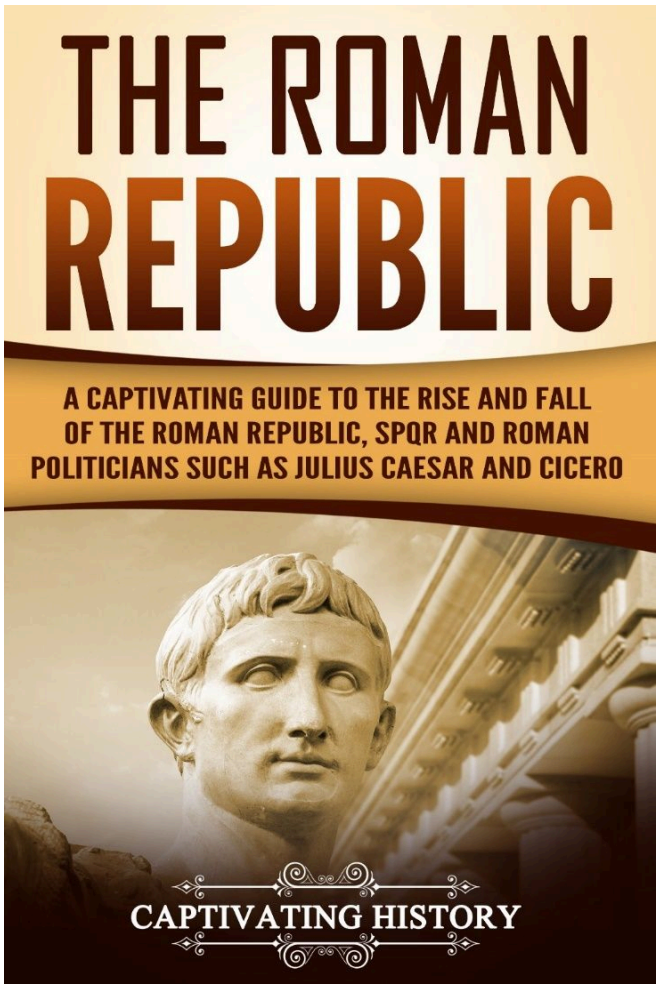

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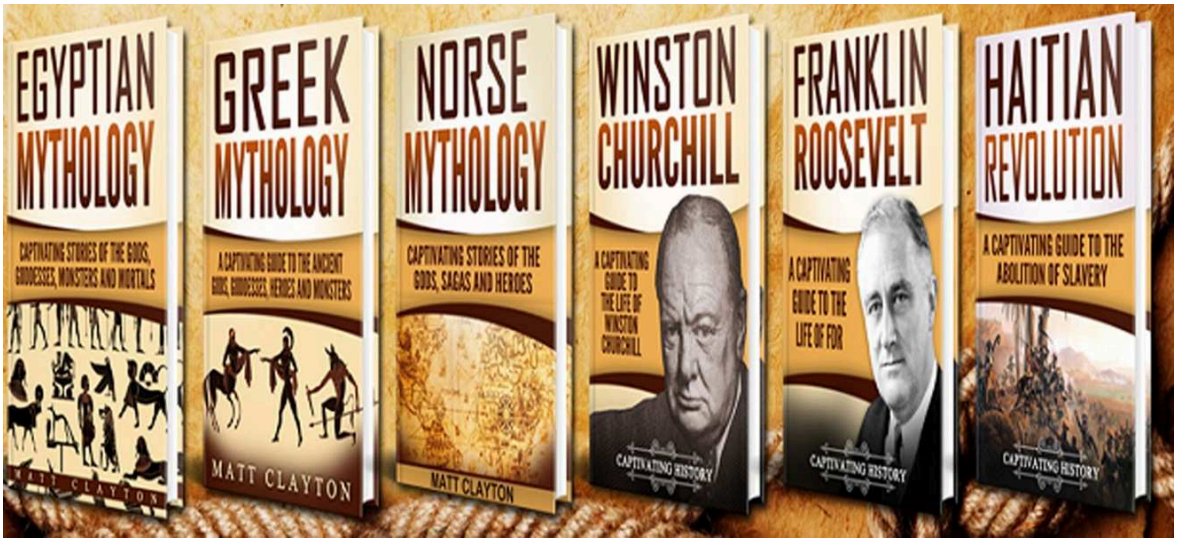

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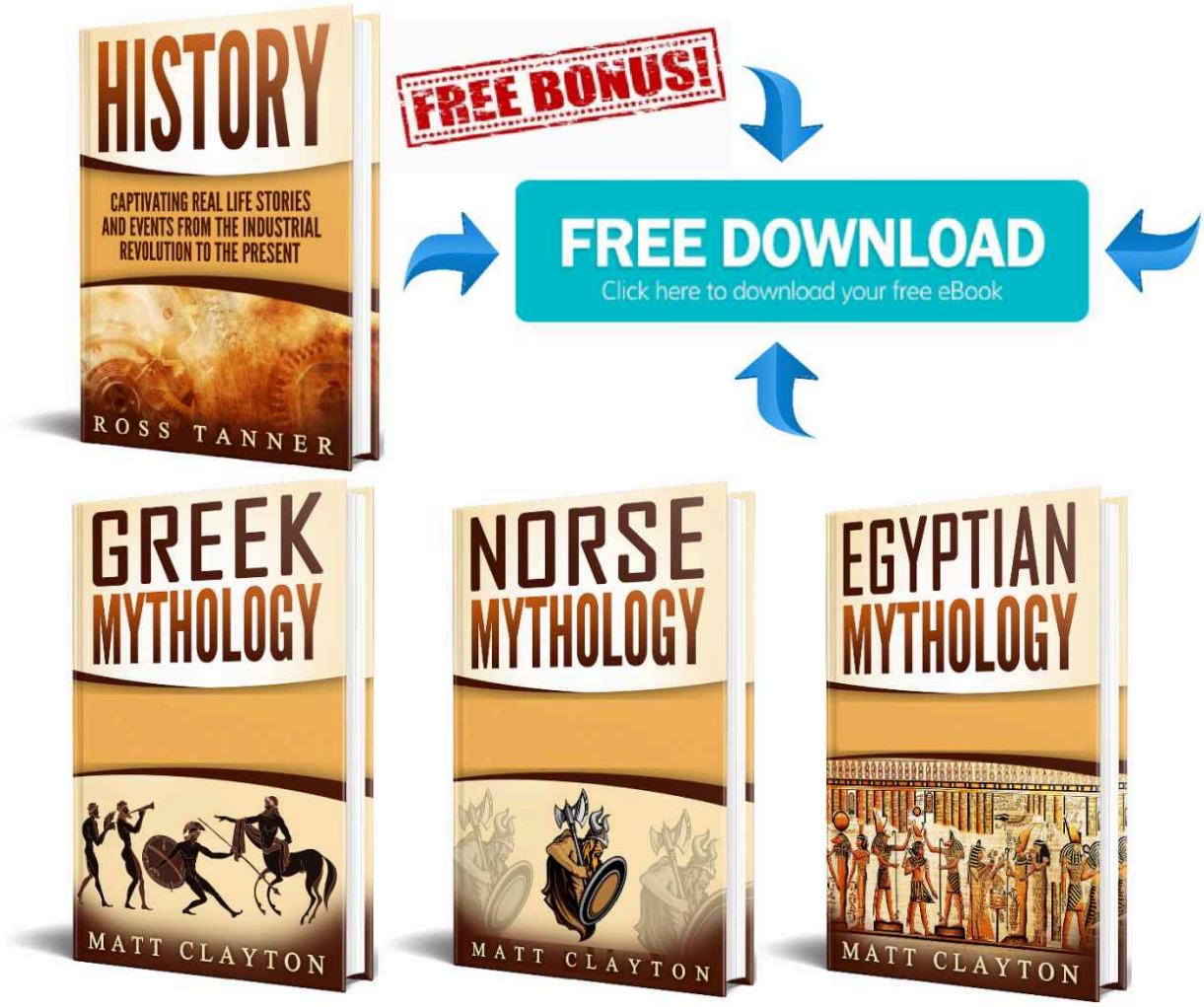

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